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“The Torch”

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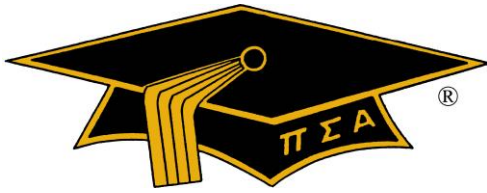
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THE TORCH

The God of Great Endeavor gave me a torch to bear.
I lifted it high above me in the dark and murky air,
And straightway, with loud hosannas, the crowd proclaimed its light
And followed me as I carried my torch through the starless night.
'Til drunk with the people's praises, and mad with vanity,
I forgot 'twas the torch that they followed,
And fancied they followed me.

Then slowly my arm grew weary upholding the shining load,
And my tired feet went stumbling over the dusty road,
And I fell—with the torch beneath me. In a moment the light was out,
When lo from the throng a stripling sprang forth with a mighty shout,
Caught up the torch as it smoldered, and lifted it high and tall,
'Til, fanned by the winds of heaven, it fired the souls of all.

As I lay in the darkness, the feet of the trampling crowd
Passed over and far beyond me, its paeans proclaiming aloud,
And I learned in the deepening twilight, the glorious verity,
'Tis the torch that the people follow,
Whoever the bearer may be.

— Anonymous, from a nineteenth-century poetry anthology, adapted by Elizabeth Furry (Florida State University, 1925), revised 2011